

CHRISTIAN DRAMA



JULY 1950

ONE SHILLING

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
EDITORIAL	1
WHAT IS CHRISTIAN DRAMA? HUGH ROSS-WILLIAMSON	2
HOW TO STUDY A SCRIPT NORA RATCLIFF	4
MARLOWE'S ORTHODOXY ENID WELSFORD	8
BRING IT ALIVE PAMELA KEILY	13
FOR THE YOUNG CHILD FREDA COLLINS	16
NEWS OF THE OTHERS	18
R.D.S. NOTES	27

EDITORIAL

THE death of Jim Bartholomew in Trinidad on Tuesday, May 16, 1950, after a short illness, deprives the Society of its Secretary. Jim gave the last five years of his life here to R.D.S., and the passage of time will only show more clearly the golden quality of the gift. He was a channel of grace to so many of us that one pen cannot try to express what his loss means to each of us. Perhaps all he would wish is that his friends should resolve to give all possible help to the Society's officers and staff as they face, without the visible support of Jim's gaiety, courage, and wisdom, the heavy responsibilities of the 1951 programme.

A short memoir, with two photographs, accompanies this issue.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee on May 12 it was decided to engage a Producer of an R.D.S. Touring Company 1951, to fulfil engagements already being offered to R.D.S. A full account of the plan will appear in our Autumn issue, but enquiries can now be received and answered by the office. This is a very serious venture for our small Society, only made possible because of a donation, of which particulars will be made known later, from a benefactor who heard Jim speak last year, and only undertaken because it is a challenge we feel bound to accept.

R.D.S. has been charged by the Advisory Committee of Christian Churches to the Festival of Britain with general responsibility for religious drama in London during the Festival period. This is a charge we can only fulfil if we have the prayers and active help of every member of the Society.

The Cover design, specially drawn for the Society by John Piper will, we are sure, rouse interested comment from members. It incorporates a symbol of our Lord, with masks of Comedy and Tragedy. Jim, who saw the original before he left for Trinidad was particularly enthusiastic about it as being wholly free from any suggestion of the "pretty-pretty."

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN DRAMA?

By HUGH ROSS WILLIAMSON

It may seem somewhat late in the day to ask the question, and I admit frankly here at the beginning that I do not know the answer. But it seems necessary to try to find some criterion by which to judge the growing number of plays which are claimed as Christian drama and to have some principles on which to base conclusions not only about choosing such plays but about acting them.

No one will quarrel with the truism that drama and religion are intertwined at the very roots. The basis of the dramatic pattern is that all growth implies destruction and re-creation. This is the nature of Nature itself and, so, of natural religion. The obvious examples of the inter-relationship of religion and drama are the Greek tragedies (or, rather, trilogies) where this tragic pattern is explicitly stated. As Professor Tillyard has put it: "The complete tragic pattern is to be found in the Aeschylean trilogy. Here the evidence is that the first two plays dealt with the destructive process, the last with new creation. The *Eumenides*, the only third play that survives as a whole, records the beginning of a new way of life after the destructive havoc wrought by the blood-feud. And the final, lost play of the Promethean trilogy represented a new order of things when Prometheus was reconciled with Zeus." But the pattern, of course, is not confined to Greek tragedy. It is in *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast* (and how exciting for sophisticated contemporaries Cocteau has made that); in *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Doctor's Dilemma*; in *The School for Scandal* and *The Importance of Being Ernest*. It is, in fact, the basic formula for every play, however far in treatment and theme it may seem to have wandered away from its base.

"Religious drama," in its specific sense, merely means drama which goes back to its roots and treats the theme explicitly; and it is worth noting that melodrama (which is the nearest approximation to it in ordinary play-writing) has never lost its hold on the simple.

But "religious drama" is not "Christian drama" any more than "religion" is the same as "Christianity." This is a most important distinction. C. S. Lewis has epitomised it clearly at the beginning of his chapter on "Christianity and 'Religion'" in *Miracles*: "We who defend Christianity find ourselves constantly opposed not by the irreligion of our hearers but by their real religion. Speak about beauty, truth and goodness, or about a God who is simply the indwelling principle of these three, speak about a great spiritual force pervading all things, a common mind of which we are all parts, a pool of generalised spirituality to which we can all flow, and you will command friendly interest. But the temperature drops as soon as you mention a God who has purpose and performs particular actions, who does one thing and not another, a concrete, choosing, commanding, prohibiting God with a determinate character. People become embarrassed or angry. Such a conception seems to them primitive and crude and even irreverent."

ERRATA

Through a regrettable failure of liaison, the uncorrected proof of Miss Welsford's article "Marlowe's Orthodoxy" appears in this issue.

The following corrections should be made:

- P. 8, line 1. *The Tragical History.*
- P. 10, line 18. Faustus and the latter's shortlived "omnipotence"
- P. 11, line 2. Ay, so are all things else, but whereabouts?
- P. 11, line 18. Nay, and this be hell, I'll willingly be damned.
- P. 11, lines 19 and 24. Faust-book
- P. 11, line 47. Devil
- P. 11, line 48. the Saviour (the appropriate reversal of rebellious self-sufficiency) combined with a deliberate endurance of present pain and refusal of present pleasure (the appropriate reversal of his egoistical worship "of his own appetite").
- P. 12, line 31. humanist

It is in this positive and exclusive way that Christian drama differs from religious drama. The natural tragic pattern of growth, destruction, recreation—or birth, death and rebirth—becomes narrowed down to the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. The Christian, certainly, sees these as the culmination and fulfilment of the natural religion; but the non-Christian might regard them only as cramping, irrelevant and suspect. He might concede that they formed one interesting aspect of the tragic pattern, one anthropological explanation; but not—as the Christian contends—the unique and eternal (and therefore contemporary) Truth.

What is more, the Christian regards them as of ultimate and supreme importance to every member of the *audience*, and thus the Christian dramatist's aim is not, cannot be, merely *catharsis* but *catharsis* in terms of *conversion*. To the spectators at a Greek drama, it might be enough to have the soul purged with pity and terror and to come away in a stoic mood which would enable them better to suffer the pains of life. To quote Professor Tillyard again: "Those who witness tragedy are encouraged to heighten their own vitality by re-enacting the same process in themselves." But the spectator of a Christian drama should go away in a very different mood—in the sure and certain hope of the consequences to himself of the *historical* Resurrection.

If these simple and obvious truisms be conceded, it will be seen, I think, that the problem of Christian drama is more complex than many of us at first thought. How is it to be written? Can it, indeed, be written adequately either for church or theatre? An ordinary theatrical audience, to-day, will not accept Christian presuppositions as we found, for example, by the reception of Mauriac's *Les Mal Aimés* and Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*, both of which constituted puzzles for the average non-Christian (and therefore preponderant) theatre-goer. A play about a great Christian is unlikely to hold the stage, unless it be written, like *Saint Joan*, from an anti-Christian point of view; and even a film like *Monsieur Vincent* had to make dangerous concessions to public sentimentality and misunderstanding (with the result that it was Richelieu who became the mouthpiece of the true doctrine of selfless anonymity). Without Christian presuppositions in the minds of the audience, can there be Christian drama in the theatre?

And if a play be written for performance in church how much must it betray its purpose by "modern" interpretations? I am second to none in my admiration of much of Charles Williams' work, but would anyone contend that all his plays put together were worth one *Everyman* as Christian (that is, converting) drama? And is not the one and only test of a play's success *in a church* not how well it is acted, not how many people come to it, but how many of the audience come back, because of seeing it, to the ordinary life and services of the church? It is not the number at the performance that matters, but the number next morning at Holy Communion.

There remains the further question as to whether Christian drama can be acted and produced except by Christians. The fashionable school of the moment contends that an actor, merely by fulfilling conscientiously his

function as an actor, by interpreting his part to the best of his ability, is thereby praising God in his own way and is thus fitted to act *Charley's Aunt* one night and *The Way of the Cross* the next. This has always seemed to me to be notable nonsense. But thus to dismiss it is not to dispose of the problem of indifferent acting, which is a real one. To this there is no clear-cut solution, but on the one hand it might be remembered that often sincerity makes its own impression (and Christian drama as such is not concerned with aesthetics to the extent that ordinary drama is) and, on the other, a practical step might be taken by strengthening and maintaining a constant liaison with the Actor's Church Union. There is no real difficulty in getting an all-star West End cast of Christian actors. What is lacking is adequate material for them to use.

So we come back to the original question: What is Christian drama? If I have not been able to answer it, I hope I have a little clarified the position. And I am practically certain that many correspondents know quite certainly the answer that is eluding me.

The first of a series of articles designed to be of practical use to Producers comes from the experienced and wise pen of Nora Ratcliff, teacher, author, and producer.

HOW TO STUDY A SCRIPT

THE successful production of a play demands clearness of intention, forethought, common sense, and hard work: each factor has a definite contribution to make to the final result.

First, clearness of intention. Producer and cast must know exactly what they are aiming at, and all must aim at the same thing. Preliminary reading and discussion are essential. Don't be too impatient to be up and doing: you'll get there all the quicker if you study the map first. To journey hopefully may be great fun, but successful arrival is better. Discussions on the whole play, and on each act or scene should find an answer to four questions:

What is the play/scene about?

Whom is it about?

What exactly happens?

What convention does the play demand? What is the over-riding mood of any particular scene?

1. *What* is the play about? What statement does it offer on life, religion, human character? Sum it up in a sentence, and you have your theme. Material for discussion here, and possibly at first a variety of opinions. Discussions will familiarize everybody with the play, for opinion must be backed by quotation and example. Finally agreement must be reached. The theme of a whole play is sometimes easier to find than the

aim of a single scene. Read Act 1 Scene 3 of Freda Collins' play *Cyprian*. Then read it again. What is it about? Apart from Marcion's semi-apostasy, which is part of the main plot of the play, the "theme" of this scene is the panic reaction to persecution, the acid testing of faith. ("It's the Christians. They refuse to go home.")

2. *Whom* is the play/scene about? This needs a discussion of the characters, their motives, the relationship between them, their comparative significance. Details of background, only implied, perhaps, must be clearly established. For instance, what is the difference in personality between GALERIUS and VALENTINUS, the Roman officers? What is the state of mind of each of the several Christians? What mental reactions lie behind the lines of VALENTINUS, GALERIUS and MARCION in the final sequence? What revelations of MARCION's character does the scene offer?

3. What happens exactly? i.e., what physical action takes place on the stage? Trace the stages of the action and then compare the importance of the several events. In this way we find the climax and the moments of minor crisis. In the *Cyprian* scene two events seem to claim attention over the others because they deal with characters already introduced: ROGATION stands firm, MARCION yields. Clear contrast here, and, lest we should consider ROGATION'S stand exceptional we have the NINUS incident, offering an even closer parallel to MARCION. NINUS is tempted by the chance of entering the army: he refuses. MARCION, promised promotion and his family's safety, recants. Study of the play as a whole shows that ROGATION fades out of the picture, but MARCION'S apostasy is part of the main plot. So the main weight must go to the MARCION scene, however dramatic the other incidents are in themselves. NINUS must not be allowed to "steal the scene" from MARCION.

4. In what convention is the play to be produced? Realistic? Poetic (statement by visual and verbal symbol, rather than direct speech and incident)? The answer affects both acting and presentation. Realism strives to obtain an illusion of actuality, details must be authentic. Symbolic treatment demands imaginative design in presentation, study of the dialogue for its implicit significance. Once we have fixed the convention of the whole play, the *mood* of each scene must be determined: in the extract quoted the mood is one of panic and urgency, a clamouring crowd outside, the over-worked officers ("Next?" Like a Food Office clerk at the Emergency Card counter). The alternating apostasy and firmness of the several Christians builds up to MARCION'S line: "I am torn in pieces."

All this discussion takes time, but later, when the group gets down to actual rehearsal, it will save time, argument, and woolliness of purpose.

So much for clearness of intention. Now for forethought. The producer will save himself and the cast much harassment by spending a few quiet hours at his desk. In support of Forethought he will summon her sister, Common Sense. Where is the production to take place? Church, theatre, schoolroom, church hall . . . The producer must, from the start,

visualize the play in terms of the stage where it is to be performed. "Don't start off with high-falutin' ideas which will have to be scrapped," says Common Sense. "Get exact details and measurements and work to those," says Forethought. If you are going to tour the play, see that your settings are simple and adaptable. Twelve-foot flats may be grand in your own hall, but what about that converted nissen hut at Little Puddlewick? CYPRIAN has six different settings, requiring changes between comparatively short scenes, so a neutral curtain backing will save a lot of time, and "period" furniture can be made of light and easily-shifted materials. Work out the essentials of each scene: entrances, steps, doorways. Make some attempt to sketch what you want, and you will soon find details which need amplifying. Draw ground plans to scale, showing the position of furniture, the way doors have to open, etc. Next work out your lighting (the grouping of the players at the dramatic moments will already have taken shape in your mind). If you know from the start what you want there's some hope of your getting it. The dress rehearsal is too late to start briefing your lighting expert, and certainly too late to be moving about the furniture and the players because you can't get the spotlight angled as you want it. Hold your "briefing party" of stage manager, wardrobe mistress or costume designer, electrician, property mistress, etc., before active rehearsals start. Above all, keep yourself clear of back-stage jobs: find somebody else to put on effects records, rattle thunder sheets, and shake boxes of peas. Trust your stage manager, and you will be amply rewarded; insist on doing half his work for him, and he'll probably make a mess of the other half.

Meantime you have been preparing the script for rehearsals. This means plotting the grouping and movements of the players in the interleaved Prompt Book. Experienced players, once they have fully grasped the significance of a scene, will fall automatically into effective positions and make their way from one set "picture" to the next. Inexperienced actors need much more help, welcome specific directions, and like to feel that you've got it all cut and dried. Your hours of preparation will give control and exactitude from the start and establish confidence. Grouping is a matter of common sense: an important speaker needs to be upstage of the players to whom he is speaking so that his lines will carry over the footlights, unless, of course, the *effect* of what he is saying is more important, then you'll switch him downstage. Notice in the *Cyprian* scene that the officers' table is downstage because the audience needs to see the reactions of the Christian. Don't always plant your dominant figure plumb centre; shift the focus from side to side; aim at variety.

Early rehearsals will be spent in getting these mechanics smoothly incorporated with the dialogue and with the individual interpretations of the players. By the time the actors have got rid of their scripts (about the fourth rehearsal of any particular scene) they should be moving easily about the stage, ready to give themselves to the job of *acting*. Don't be pig-headed about sticking to your original draft: fresh possibilities may occur to you as you grow more familiar with the play, and the players themselves may think up extra bits of business.

By the time the actors have dropped their scripts the producer, too, should have handed the Prompt Book to an efficient Prompt. Too many inexperienced producers think they can prompt at rehearsals. But Prompt must keep his eyes pretty well glued to the book; a producer must never be distracted from the stage and the players (a producer's concentration is an immeasurable help to the actors, a foretaste of an audience). The two jobs, then, are manifestly incompatible.

Once lines are fairly well fixed, once moves and business are smooth: once stage staff are briefed, and the actors have both hands free—then the Producer's place is in Front. Then the really hard work begins.

To what extent should a producer control the acting? If the cast is inexperienced he will probably have to teach them quite a lot, but he should not impose on them his own style of acting. Show them how to do it? Certainly it is sometimes necessary to show a player the effect of a piece of timing, a complicated move, or even a sample of emotional acting in order to create the right emotion inside the player himself. But a producer should not drill his players into becoming mere mimics of his own work. He must stimulate imagination (interpret, for example, Roman tyranny in terms of modern suppression of free thought), provoke emotion, not superimpose an artificial "registering" of fear, joy, etc. He will probably need to illustrate a few technical points, position of the feet for easy turns, the difference between dull and expressive hands, for example. He must be ready to correct false emphasis and wrong inflexions, not for parrot-like imitation, but by clearing up the meaning of a line, explaining why the line sounds wrong. Above all, a producer should never, except, possibly, in a very stylised production, impose gesture. With experienced players his chief task is to represent the future audience, to make sure that the players are putting over the theme, characterization, action, and mood decided on in the early discussions.

Should a producer interrupt his players, or let them go right through a scene and then comment? When the players are first rid of their books give them a fairly free rein so that their interpretation can grow. But before things have become too fixed (and after warning the players), the producer should devote one or two rehearsals of each scene to hammering at detail, letting nothing pass, interrupting every time there is need. A trying business for everybody, but the next time the actors are given their head they will realize the benefit of the "nagging." During the last few rehearsals the players should go all out, free from interruption.

Finally, a producer should remember that no two human beings are alike, and he must know each actor well enough to get the best out of him. Some people are slow studies and, unless allowed to work at their own pace, get rattled; others are lazy and need friendly but firm bullying; some are conceited; others diffident; some bristling with temperament, others phlegmatic. This is the human material out of which he must build his play and he must handle it with discretion and sympathy. And the handling of human beings is also a matter of clearness of intention, forethought (i.e. tact), and common sense.

MARLOWE'S ORTHODOXY

(The second of two articles)

By ENID WELSFORD

THE date of *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* is uncertain but it is later than *Tamburlaine* and in it Marlowe seems to be answering some of the questions asked in the earlier play. Is *Tamburlaine* divine or diabolical? Is his death a disaster or a triumph? It is hard to say. About the character and ultimate fate of the Doctor of Wittenberg, however, there is no uncertainty. He, like the Scythian Shepherd, is a successful self-made man driven by his restless genius into rivalry with God Himself; but whereas *Tamburlaine* is hopeful, enthusiastic, single-minded and never hampered by doubt of his super-human vocation, *Faustus* is despairing, world weary, tempted, and he hesitates until he dies the most disastrous of all deaths. For there is now no doubt about it. This kind of ambition is evil, *Faustus* is in league with the Devil, he is heading for Hell. Obviously Marlowe is having second thoughts about the glory of rebellious humanism. Is *Faustus*, then, an expression of Christian orthodoxy? That is the question that we must now examine.

When we first meet *Faustus* he is considering the University curriculum and failing to settle his studies because every subject has its own limits and he wants an outlet for his inexhaustible intellectual energy and resents everything that frustrates the free exercise of his own will. Unfortunately every human being is finite by nature. "Yet art thou still but *Faustus* and a man."

There are, however, two possible ways of escape from human limitations: theology offers knowledge and enjoyment of the Infinite God, magic (like modern science) offers to confer an almost limitless potency and effectiveness upon the human will.

"A sound magician is a mighty god:

Here, *Faustus*, tire thy brains to gain a deity!"

But *Faustus* wavers. Disgusted at the trivial nature of legal studies, he has a momentary revulsion of feeling:

"When all is done divinity is best;

Jerome's Bible, *Faustus*, view it well . . .

The reward of sin is death. That's hard . . .

If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us. Why then, belike we must sin, and so consequently die.

Ay, we must die an everlasting death.

What doctrine call you this, *Che sera sera*,

What will be shall be? Divinity, adieu!"

It is to be noted that *Faustus* breaks off his biblical quotation in the middle of a passage and omits the words that follow: "but if we confess

our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Not for nothing is Doctor Faustus a graduate of Wittenberg. At this fateful moment of his life, he selects his texts with such perversity that the doctrine of predestination is deduced from a passage which when quoted in full proves the exact contrary. Evidently Faustus believes—or is persuading himself to believe—that he is a Reprobate, one of those unfortunates whom God has inexorably condemned before the foundation of the world, and this conviction (which he reiterates in his final speech) *precedes* his conflict with Lucifer.

"Go bear these tidings to great Lucifer:
 Seeing Faustus hath incurred eternal death
 By desperate thoughts against Jove's deity,
 Say he surrenders up to him his soul,
 So he will spare him four-and-twenty years,
 Letting him live in all voluptuousness."

Being damned anyway he may as well have a run for his money. So he argues but I do not think that we are meant to accept his own view of his situation and regard him as a Reprobate. The idea that his damnation is inevitable from the start is the chief weapon in the armoury of the Powers of Darkness; the true friends of Faustus, the Good Angel, the students, the old man, incite to hope and although their attempts are unsuccessful, they prove that Faustus' despair was *not* an accurate appreciation of the truth, but a temptation to which he succumbed. Though Faustus apostrophizes his adverse stars in his last soliloquy, his final verdict seems to be in favour of free will.

"Curst be the parents that engendered me!
 No, Faustus: curse thyself: curse Lucifer
 That hath deprived thee of the joys of Heaven."

Faustus is so obviously dishonest in his use of the Scriptures, that one is driven to the conclusion that his despair was not due to a mere intellectual mistake, that he *wanted* to believe in his own inevitable damnation. Why? "What ails Faustus?" asks the student. The answer is not despair, but egoism and pride, the pride which makes him unable to brook any thwarting of his immediate desires, whether for power or for pleasure; the pride that makes it impossible for him to retrace his steps, or acknowledge his dependence; the pride that could endure doom more easily than accept salvation. Faustus juggled with the Scriptures, but he knew himself, with a tragic knowledge: "The God thou servest is thine own appetite." For Faustus, being a sixteenth century Divine, not a Scythian shepherd turned dictator, could indulge no dreams of apotheosis or even of successful apostasy, his only choice was between humble repentance and a temporary and illusory triumph. He chose to go to Hell, as the price paid for "24 years omnipotence," endeavouring as best he could to hide from himself the absurdity of his decision, by trying either to believe himself a Reprobate, to whom 24 years enjoyment is better than nothing, or to dismiss Hell as a fable, or to accept Lucifer's suggestion that it is not so bad a place after all. All these consolations fail him.

Faustus, perhaps, knew himself, but he did not fully understand his position. The Devil is the Father of lies, and those who meddle with him are deceived as well as corrupted. The fate of Faustus like that of Shakespeare's Macbeth, is marked by tragic irony.

The first instance of this occurs very early. Faustus sacrifices his soul to his desire for power and independence:

"How pliant is this Mephistophilis,
Full of obedience and humility!
Such is the force of magic and my spells:"

So he thinks, but the sequel is ironical:

"FAUST. I charge thee wait upon me whilst I live,
To do whatever Faustus shall command

MEPH. I am a servant to great Lucifer,
And may not follow thee without his leave
No more than he commands must we perform.

FAUST. Did not he charge thee to appear to me?

MEPH. No, I came hither of mine own accord."

Obviously it is the Devil who is making use of Faustus, whose short-lived "omnipotence" soon proves illusory. "*Consumatum est*" he cries, as he parodies both by word and deed the Crucified Christ who shed his blood to buy back that very soul that Faustus is now re-selling to the Devil. But what is the consequence? The man who disdained Philosophy, Law and Theology gains a temporary reputation as a successful conjuror, and the comparative harmlessness of his activities only shows what a bad bargain he has made. Nor does he fare much better in his quest for pleasure. Desiring a wife, he is offered a devil, a succession of courtesans, and finally the embraces of the phantom Helen, for as he said to the Emperor ". . . it is not in my ability to present before your eyes the true substantial bodies of those two deceased princes, which long since are consumed to dust." He is profoundly right. Throughout the play the recurrent classical imagery evokes recollections of an ancient loveliness, tantalizing glimpses of an earthly Paradise, fitful and evanescent as a dream. It is indeed obvious that his "sweet pleasure" never wholly stifles his "deep despair."

But Faustus has not merely failed to build for himself a temporary Heaven on earth, his conversations with Mephistophilis suggest a far more terrible possibility.

FAUST. Where are you damned?

MEPH. In hell.

FAUST. How comes it then that thou art out of hell?

MEPH. Why this is hell, nor am I out of it:
Think'st thou that I that saw the face of God,
And tasted the eternal joys of Heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?

FAUST. Tell me where is the place that men call hell?

MEPH. Under the Heavens.

FAUST. Ay, but whereabouts?

MEPH. Within the bowels of these elements,
Where we are tortured and remain for ever;
Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
In one self place; for where we are is hell,
And where hell is there must we ever be:
And, to conclude, when all the world dissolves,
And every creature shall be purified,
All places shall be hell that art not Heaven.

FAUST. Come, I think hell's a fable. . . .

. . . Think'st thou that Faustus is so fond to imagine
That, after this life, there is any pain?

Tush; these are trifles, and mere old wives' tales.

MEPH. But, Faustus, I am an instance to prove the contrary,
For I am damned, and am now in hell.

FAUST. How! now in hell?

Nay, an this be hell, I'll willingly be damned here . . .

Marlowe owed much to the English Faust—*Boo!* There already is the analysis of inner conflict, there is the conception of a fall through *pride*, love of power, love of pleasure, and desire for "forbidden knowledge," there is the emphasis on that despair of salvation which always thwarts Faustus' repentance. But although Mephistophilis' description of Hell in the Faust *Boo!* is suggestive and impressive, there is there no hint of the idea that the devil's crime and the devil's punishment are fundamentally identical. It is at this point that the daring originality and deep insight of Marlowe are most evident. Faustus could only have acted as he did on certain suppositions which at that time were the ordinary suppositions of the average orthodox Christian—namely, that God and Heaven, virtue and the reward of virtue, sin and the punishment of sin, were all perfectly distinct and distinguishable ideas. But Mephistophilis' word suggests that since God is the Supreme Good, the Vision of God is the supreme happiness, and the rejection of God is not only punished by Hell, it already is Hell. The deduction is inescapable. Faustus has rejected God, therefore, like Mephistophilis, Faustus is in Hell, his 24 years reprieve is illusory, he has been completely hoodwinked.

But if Faustus is already in Hell, what is the significance of the time-limit and of the final catastrophe? The time-limit is *not* as the Devils would persuade Faustus, the limit of a period of indulgence before doom, but the limit of a period of uncertainty during which escape is possible. Here again we have dramatic irony, Faustus believes, or tries to believe, that his soul is irretrievably lost, but meanwhile he can enjoy himself. The fact is that he is already to all intents and purposes in Hell, but until the expiry of the time-limit his doom is not irreversible, the apparent finality of his bond with Lucifer being merely another clever trick of the devils. The repentance to which Faustus is repeatedly urged consists of a humble plea for mercy to Christ, the Saviour—the appropriate reversal

of rebellious self-sufficiency—combined with a deliberate endurance of present pain, and refusal of present pleasure—the appropriate reversal of his egoistical worship “of his own appetite.” Faustus does make abortive attempts to appeal to Christ, but in each case breaks off through fear of the devil’s threat of immediate torment, a threat which again is a mere piece of bluff.

EVIL ANGEL. “If thou repent, devils shall tear thee in pieces.

GOOD ANGEL. Repent, and they shall never raze thy skin.”

This tension and suspense continues almost to the last moment. The clock strikes eleven, the students have gone, and Faustus is left alone, not, as is usually supposed, to await his doom, but to engage in a final decisive struggle between hope and despair, which lasts for half an hour. Faustus is *predestined* to damnation, and damnation is imminent.

“The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,

The Devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.”

but no, there is still a chance:

“O, I’ll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?

See, see where Christ’s blood streams in the firmament!

One drop would save my soul—half a drop: ah, my Christ!

Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!

Yet will I call on him: O spare me, Lucifer!—

Where is it now? ’tis gone: and see where God

Stretcheth out his arm, and bends his ireful brows!”

Faustus is on the very brink of salvation, the visionary Lucifer threatens instant vengeance, instantly Faustus retracts, instantly the vision of Christ’s blood vanishes, and in its place appears the vision of the Wrathful Face of God. Faustus is confronted at last by naked fact, and the door of the prison which he voluntarily entered is finally and conclusively shut.

So now we come to the fascinating, but perhaps insoluble problem of Marlowe’s own attitude to the story he immortalized. Why did Marlowe send his aspiring humanism to Hell? A problem all the more interesting because it is difficult to avoid the impression that the play contains self-portraiture. Did Faustus despair because he was unable to discard the outworn superstitions that were impeding a perfectly legitimate intellectual advance? Or did Faustus lose his life, because he loved it so much, and was too egoistic and cowardly to test the truth of the Christian paradox? Surely the first interpretation goes counter to the actual text, which makes it clear from the opening soliloquy onwards that Faustus desires power and pleasure, not knowledge for its own sake and that consequently he has deliberately blinded himself to that vision of the Face of God which Mephistophilis equates with everlasting bliss. The devils were well-advised to check his attempts to discuss the nature of God and Heaven for had Faustus allowed himself to consider the truth of this equation, his rebellion would have been impossible and he would not have had that final vision of the Wrathful Face which was only seen after he had thwarted every attempt to save him. Miss Bradbrook* goes to the root of the

* *The School of Night*, p. 111.

matter, when she says: "Faustus reaches certainty in his damnation. God is defined for him by exclusion, Heaven is known by the knowledge of its opposite state, grace and damnation are polarized. 'All places shall be Hell that are not Heaven'. This is far enough from orthodoxy." . . . Perhaps. But it is also far enough from humanistic pride, and although there is no need to suppose that the composition of *Dr Faustus* marks a retreat into conventional religion, it does suggest that Marlowe was discovering a certain inadequacy in his own "progressive" views. Orthodox Catholics and heterodox neo-Platonists at least agreed that the highest form of human experience was contemplative and that human life reached its final and satisfying goal in love and in self-forgetful adoration of Divine Beauty. Both Tamburlaine and Faustus, however, are restless egoists. Tamburlaine is often described as "fiery," and fire is essentially a process of destruction—the professional conqueror depends upon the existence of that very enemy whom he exists only to annihilate, and it follows inevitably that the hour of complete victory is also the hour of complete collapse. *Tamburlaine* records that early moment when the doctrine of progressive self-assertion seems to be a doctrine of life, *Dr Faustus* the later moment when it is known to be a doctrine of despair.

The Tragical History of Dr Faustus is a record not of an intellectual apostasy but of a growth in spiritual experience, experience of the desperate futility of the will-to-power.

There is no need, for any who know her, to stress that when Miss Keily says "tooth and nail" she means "Tooth And Nail."

BRING IT ALIVE

By PAMELA KEILY

IN producing, I would say there is one main rule—"to bring alive"—This applies to producing any play.

In Religious Drama (Drama concerned in some way with the relationship between God and Man)—it is above all essential . . . The value of this form of Drama is the illuminating and invigorating of Truths probably already known.

But, in the world of the Theatre, the person whose ambition is that of being an artist (a magnificent ambition too) feels justified in utter ruthlessness to achieve artistic perfection . . . setting beauty as the primary aim.

With us the primary aim must be, like that of Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*, "The Glory of God and the Salvation of men."

It may involve at some point setting charity as the highest ideal, even to the detriment of artistic beauty, which is one of the differences between amateur and professional.

This does not mean that one ceases to aim at artistic perfection only that

one must never lose sight of the human quality of the medium through which one is hoping to interpret the Truth. Nor does it mean a *conscious* endeavour to "do good" to your audience, which will merely result in boredom or deliberate antagonism. Putting it quite simply—if you expect God to speak through what you are doing (and clearly that is what we all desire), you must not let the endeavour itself become an idol.

Does that sound obscure? I can assure you it is a very real risk. Hold to the fact that the very humblest and crudest may be a channel for the Grace of God, given the best artistry possible *within* the circumstances.

I don't want to sound too high falutin', nor do I feel qualified to be! But this question of real art is a tricky one. We all know the impossibility of achieving such a thing in our circumstances. One point is certain—that *real* art is a living thing in its form of expression, belonging to the particular age in which it comes into being. It is the vital translation of the Truth of the Incarnation which one strives for, the Eternal Truth expressed in terms of the age in which we live. That is why, to me, a Nativity play done on beer-boxes covered with hessian, done in the environment of some tatty hall in Sheffield, is far more *true* than an assumed artificiality, and a sometimes assumed holiness of more traditional forms of presentation in such a setting. Still I have to remind myself that even the beer-box may become an idol! Otherwise as the years go by what seems a true presentation *now* in this setting, will necessarily grow into an untruth if it does not change with the years to something different as a form of expression. Do not think I condemn the "traditional" by saying all this. If the traditional form is used with utmost perfection, it can still be true art *provided* those taking part are utterly sincere and aware in what they are doing; the dangers come when a false exterior is assumed without interior understanding.

Impact, in our circumstances of missionary endeavour, impact is of very first importance. How do you make an impact? Very often by surprise. So exercise ingenuity and imagination as far as you possibly can.

Then there always comes with Religious Drama the question of Prayers. Some people advocate these at rehearsal, personally I would say that British self-consciousness is made worse in some cases by beginning this way, though one's intuition can generally gauge where it is a perfectly natural thing to suggest. When this is so, be sure to suggest it to the Vicar in charge if you can't manage to be unself-conscious yourself. In some parishes it is the one and only hope. In all cases prayer must be behind what you are doing. As you know, the Christian Community Players have always worked with this secret foundation, and most emphatically I would say that it is the fact of this, which is the root of anything worthwhile that they may have achieved. Fight *tooth and nail* against losing sight of this, for if it ever is lost sight of, the value of the work will be utterly gone.

Above all, make your own approach either in the Christian Community Prayers, or in the parishes along this line. See yourself (as you are) as simply the implement which may be used by God. The real definition of Art which I always remember is a French quotation of Zola, "un coin

de la Nature vu a travers un temperament" . . . Apply this to Religious Drama, and you have the double necessity of being a clear channel, or a "Translucent" temperament, if that is a more apt translation. For you are using a medium through which a double revelation may be given of both artistic and religious Truth.

In practical terms, what it amounts to is this—back what you are doing with Prayer, go for it with the Glory of God as your first motive, and when it is all maddening and irritating and seemingly wholly impossible to achieve, hang on like grim death! You may feel quite sure you are going off your head! Get round this by accepting even that as the price you have to pay for something which is after all a most marvellous opportunity. The more insane you feel, the more likely it is that what you are creating is worthwhile. *Don't lose your temper if you can help it!*

The mental harassments and so forth just happen to be the particular price one pays in this sort of work, which wouldn't be likely to have much value if it didn't cost something. There is also lots of chance of enjoyment, and the more those whom you are handling can be made to enjoy what they are doing, the better. It's not likely you will enjoy yourself while the thing is in process of being created, though you will at the end, if the job has been well done. Approach your dumb and evidently un-enthusiastic actor as affirmatively as you can, with an attitude of taking it for granted he can cope with what you are giving him to do. It is often surprising how eventually he manages to enjoy himself.

Equally you will feel as if the end has come when someone "Walks out on you." Continue (minus one) regardless, and rally everyone in the cast to help in supplying a substitute. Probably a wholly inappropriate being will eventually turn up, take him gladly, cutting down as many of his lines as possible, but keeping the other folk together somehow.

No hard and fast rules can possibly be laid down in this kind of work. *"Bringing alive" is what matters.*

WILL YOU TOO?

. . . and I want to explain about a modest cheque which Sheffield sent . . . We make a rule of sending 2/6 to R.D.S. on every show played by the Christian Community Players . . .

**If everyone did this, what couldn't
the Society achieve?**

FOR THE YOUNG CHILD

By FREDA COLLINS

WHAT is our aim in presenting religious drama to children? Is it to teach the child about God or to teach him to love God? Surely our aim is to promote love through prayer and worship: the means we may use to obtain this aim are varied. They are concerned with giving the child knowledge about God, and for this drama can be a most useful medium.

But the goal must be God, for our ultimate aim is worship.

Why use drama? It is a medium which is not only understood, but enjoyed by children of every age. Rightly used, it helps to co-ordinate the whole person: body, mind and spirit. Incidentally because the child enjoys the fun of acting, he submits to a voluntary discipline in order to achieve his best efforts. Finally, dedicated drama, however simple, provides an outlet for the child's natural instinct for reverence.

How shall we recognize the suitable story? Briefly the ingredients may be listed as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) A God-centred subject. | (2) A simple plot. |
| (3) Clear, short dialogue. | (4) Plenty of action. |
| (5) Humour when possible. | (6) An elastic cast. |

The requirements may need explanation. The God-centred subject has already been stressed. The need for a simple plot may be realized by adults, but it is strange how it is usually missed by children play-acting by themselves. They so often have an enthusiastic beginning, but the play tends to dwindle away into endless eating, or the tending of ailments. As the child grows, this tendency should be gently curbed, and the teacher can do much by insisting that a religious play, however short, is begun, continued *and ended* for God. The clear, short dialogue is soon willingly provided by children; but there is a general inclination to listen to a seemingly endless monologue by one or two of the more inventive children. Drama for children means action. The play chosen should provide this throughout. Humour is a God-given gift, and where possible should be used for Him. The introduction of animals often enables it to be introduced. The elastic cast is for the benefit of all concerned. It gives employment to all the children and ensures that they are kept under the teacher's eye. When children are not actually supposed to be upon the stage, it is useful to let them sit, with their backs turned in their given place on the acting space, until the moment comes for their "re-appearance," when they can jump up and turn around again.

"*Goodnight Bible Stories*" (Mowbrays) contains a series of dramatic stories on the life of Our Lord which can easily be converted into plays without the necessity for the children to memorize the exact words.

To help the child to act intelligently, from the earliest days it is wise

to promote an acting tradition of order and pattern so that the play as a whole is seen and understood by the children. A simple shape chart (or diagram), of the chosen scene, drawn with coloured chalks on the floor, will not only help the children to visualize the action, but will also clarify the play in the mind of the teacher.

The most obvious danger of which we should be warned, is the fostering of exhibitionism in any child with a fully developed dramatic instinct. Changing parts constantly, as a normal procedure, gives everyone a chance to shine, and ensures that an interest is taken in the whole play, not only limiting the interest to the individual child's own part. Connected with this danger is that of overlooking the backward child. Exactly the reverse should be our aim. Infinite delight can be given by bestowing the gaudiest "dress-ups" (real or imaginary) on such a child. By our watchfulness and sympathy we may help to work a miracle through drama.

The story of the Good Shepherd will attract tiny children. For the beginning, in the first stages, the children can all turn into sheep, baa-ing about the room. Each can then choose a name, and come up to the Shepherd (probably the teacher), when called, to be loved by him. The good sheep can pretend to eat and sleep and gambol, but they always stop when the Good Shepherd calls.

For the middle section of the play, perhaps one naughty sheep will not come when the Shepherd calls. She goes away and hides. The Good Shepherd calls all his sheep by name, and they answer with a "baa" . . . all but the naughty sheep. The others can sit down and watch, while the Good Shepherd hunts round for the missing sheep. By now the naughty sheep is frightened. She sees the Shepherd and "baas," calling to him, and so is found. This completes the middle section.

The Good Shepherd picks up his naughty sheep and carries her over to the others, who jump up and gambol with joy. The Shepherd puts down the naughty sheep, who shows she is very sorry, and promises never to stray away again. For the very end of the story, the Shepherd may walk away, calling to his sheep who follow him, the naughtiest one along with all the rest.

Here you have a story with all the ingredients mentioned above as needed for a play, including a beginning, middle and end. There is even the simple; short dialogue of the baa-ing of the sheep; the difficulty will be to stop them baa-ing! This "dialogue" is sustained by the conversation of the Good Shepherd. There is plenty of action, and probably humour (although unconscious!), and the cast is certainly elastic. We have a God-centred subject, although the actual teaching of the love of God, which is the theme of the story, must be the special work of the teacher. She is using this very simple form of religious drama as the means, and not the end of her work: which, as we said, is to lead the child to worship.

MUCH AS WE LOVE

—old friends, we welcome new members.

NEWS OF THE OTHERS

STAR TURN ONE

Isle of Man. Nance Caine writes:—

Religious Drama has had quite a busy time here during the last week or two. I'm sending you a newspaper cutting taken from *Mona's Herald*.

"Distinction of giving the first repertory production of *Noah*, was earned by the Palace Players at the Gaiety Theatre last night.

"Good theatre it certainly was, splendidly presented, with excellent settings and effects, and finely acted."

The "Palace Players" are a repertory Company who have been here for the last five winters. They have a bit of a struggle to compete with umpteen Picture Houses, Dance Hall, Whist Drives, Badminton Championships, Dancing ditto, Amateur Dramatics and Choral Singing for Music Festival, in a town of just over 20,000.

Their season isn't a very long one but they have by now become an "institution" and have a loyal following. They are a weekly "rep" and ring the changes on farce, thriller, comedy, drama and what have you. So the production of *Noah* was an achievement. It was splendidly done. It wasn't everyone's play, of course, so they didn't play to full houses.

So here you are, for a subject for debate: "Christian Drama from the Box Office standard as played by a 'Secular' Company of Actors."

I suppose you need courage and faith that you may educate your public. The Palace Players have given *Deep are the Roots*, *Granite*, *Wind of Heaven* among their serious plays.

My other enclosure is a programme of Rev. G. R. Myers' play, *Miracle*, done by a group of church workers under a most enthusiastic young minister, Rev. Richard Keen.

Almost all are without any other drama experience yet they gave a deeply moving performance. Their sincerity was quickly responded to by the audience. I was amazed at the improvement in their technique since their last year's play.

Miracle suffers a little, especially in the last act, from too much talk, but it has many, many good points. It certainly became a vehicle for Christian Worship last Sunday night.

On Good Friday I had a similar feeling about a Passion Play given at St Matthew's Church. This Church has a tradition for Religious Plays. Its former Vicar (it is very High Anglican) used to produce most wonderfully spectacular Nativity Plays. A feast to the aesthetic sense, exquisitely dressed and staged in the Church—three levels of stage—gauze to reveal most beautifully poised angel choir, etc. Now its glory has departed—the present Vicar gives a very simple passion play in the School-room. Yet its simplicity and restraint made me feel "It is good to be here."

Our School of Art Dramatic Group gave *Wishing Well* (a delightful Welsh Comedy with people trying to make the world better) and my other group did *Wind of Heaven* (Emlyn Williams) which some folk regard almost as blasphemous and not religious at all!

STAR TURN TWO

Lanercost Priory. The Rev. R. Lindsay writes:

Miss D. R. W. Carr, producer of the Durham County Fellowship of Religion and Drama, has asked me if I would send you the enclosed independent appreciation of Richard Ward's *The Figure on the Cross* for publication in *Christian Drama* together with a few comments of my own about its reception.

Lanercost Priory is the Parish Church of a very large country parish with a scattered population employed directly or indirectly in agriculture. The large congregation that gathered to witness Miss Carr's production of a rather "high-brow" religious drama was representative of this rural community and for many of them it was their first experience of really good work of this kind. Personally I have never shared in such a great spiritual experience as on this occasion and from correspondence, telephone calls and personal contacts after the play I was not alone in my experience. Miss Carr's and her players' work did more than justice to Richard Ward's work. It was completely understood by the congregation for whom it was a revelation of what religious drama can be and do. Works of this kind done reverently, sincerely and above all with a deep understanding of what is being attempted on the part of the producer, players and helpers, is at once an inspiration and an example of what drama in our churches can do for our people. Further, they will help to do away with some of the inferior and unworthy material which is sometimes suggested for use in Churches as "religious drama."

AN APPRECIATION

For those who had eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to understand, this was indeed a wonderful privilege. Here, in the atmosphere of the ancient Priory, in beautiful and moving words and mime we saw depicted "Man's inhumanity to man," and not to man only, but to God's Perfect Man and Man's Perfect God. Not only were we taken to Calvary, but we saw how Calvary is identified with, and revealed in, every kind and condition of human agony, as in scene after scene of human life the Seven Words from the Cross were interpreted to us. Anyone who could come away unmoved from this lovely and stirring Act of Devotion must indeed be dull both in heart and mind.

STAR TURN THREE

Southwark. *And it was Night.* Richard Ashton (Acting Secretary R.D.S.) writes:

Who are the "D.A. Players"? They were formed in 1945 during a parish outing up the River, and since then have been playing regularly over a wide area South of the Thames. On one tour they raised over £100 for The Bishop of Southwark's Appeal Fund. They call themselves "D.A." because they wish to remain "Definitely Anonymous" ("Don't Ask" to those who don't like long words), but I *am* allowed to say that they come from a desperately poor parish which has suffered badly through

bombing. All the players are under twenty years of age and are regular communicants. Accepting no payment whatsoever, they are prepared to play practically anywhere, and all the plays they put on are written and produced by the Vicar.

After tea I was introduced to the cast which looked just like a Junior League football team complete with supporters, and I am told that they *are* very good at football with a practically unbeaten parish team, but I had my doubts as to what the play on the stage was going to be like as there did not seem to be much artistic talent here. On this particular evening the show was being presented at a church about four miles away, and the whole party had a very merry time on the top of a tramcar—so merry in fact that one passenger moved downstairs. Appearances sometimes are deceptive however. The play was about Judas Iscariot, and although some critics would quite rightly have said that the whole production was far too melodramatic, for this cast it seemed just the right thing, and a large audience enjoyed every minute of it.

ALL THE REST

Vancouver, B.C. Mr Charles Wright writes:

At last I have been able to produce *The Man Who Played Judas*. This was at St Paul's Church Hall last Sunday night (Palm Sunday) after evensong. Fifty-nine people stayed for this—and a cup of tea afterwards. Their response was extremely gratifying, and was by no means due to the tea. There are a number of things that I learnt while directing it that may interest you.

In spite of its simplicity it is a difficult play. I knew that all along, of course. It needs experienced players. I think we got it across without ranting.

Our lighting was not a success. St Paul's has the minimum of equipment and convenience, and our attempts to rig up moonlight failed. We finally had to settle for the glow of a 60-watt white frosted lamp.

Instead of a stool we used a short bench which happened to be on the stage when we were rehearsing. In future we shall probably use one of those kitchen chairs with the back broken off, which are always to be found in church halls.

It has now been given in three church halls. The last occasion was on Low Sunday, after Evensong, at St John's (Anglican), Shaughnessy. The sermon was eliminated, and the Junior Choir, which functions at evening services, led the congregation with a processional hymn into the hall where the play was ready to begin. This seems to me the ideal method of presenting a short play which is not suitable as a chancel play. Two hundred people were present. Comments indicated that the performance was "impressive." If so, we reached the level hoped for.

New Malden. *The Wimbledon Borough News* reports:

More than four hundred people saw the Holy Cross Passion Play last week. The play, *Nicodemus* by Andrew Young was given at St Saviour's, Grand Drive, on Monday, and at Holy Cross Church on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. It was performed by a cast of eighteen men, all members of Holy Cross, and the incidental music, composed for the play by Imogen Holst, was sung by the augmented choir of the church. The play was produced by Mr Harold Gooch.

Nicodemus, a modern verse drama by one of the most outstanding of our contemporary poets, was an ambitious play for a small church, but it thoroughly justified its choice.

The revival of religious drama which grows apace is a recovery of the old tradition of putting the Church's teaching into dramatic form and performing it

on the altar steps. Judging by the popularity of *Nicodemus* there is much that can be done in this direction if the plays are well chosen and the acting as good as in ordinary theatre.

The eighteen men in *Nicodemus* prefer to remain anonymous. This is again traditional in religious drama where the play is regarded as itself an act of worship.

Collections at the performances realized over £21 and the profits from the play are to be given to the Bishop of Southwark's Appeal Fund.

H.

Pontypridd. Gerald Morgan writes:

St Mary's Players gave two performances of the *Coronation of Christ* by Margaret Cropper, and the only criticism was that it was too short.

Our Players have had a successful season with two three-act plays besides the Nativity and Passion Play. I am fortunate in having a small but very keen little company which at the end of its second year is finding its feet and getting known in the district.

Kensington. St. John's Church. Rev. Marcus Spencer writes:

"During each of the last three years, we have been led into a deeper understanding of the life of our Master through episodes from Miss Dorothy L. Sayers' *The Man Born to be King*," rendered unseen from the back gallery of the church. Miss Sayers has combined a detailed knowledge of the Bible and of Palestinian life and customs with a sure, dramatic instinct and singular felicity of speech, in such a way as to bring home the Gospel events clearly, poignantly, unforgettably. We were fortunate to have the same group of anonymous friends—many of them busy professional people—willing to help us once more into this more intimate knowledge of the highest truth. As a part of the Easter morning service, the visit of the women to the empty tomb was reverently portrayed. In addition, on three week-nights, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, May 2nd, 4th and 5th, at 8.30 p.m., *The King Comes to His Own*, the final play in the series, was rendered in full with appropriate music and as an act of worship. This is of course the perfect episode for the month of May, since it covers the events from Easter to Whitsun. The dates were chosen to fall within the week of the General Assembly, in order that visitors from other parts of England could attend. The hour was fixed late enough not to interfere with Assembly business, yet so that the production could be completed about 9.45 and thus enabling those at a distance to find their way home at a reasonable hour. The gathering dusk made possible the use of lighting effects. A member of R.D.S. reports "excellent," and it is hoped that the same company will be able to repeat the performance for the 1951 Festival.

Oxford.

The Oxford Mystical Players gave performances of *The Victory of the Cross* by M. Creagh-Henry during Holy Week at St Columba's, Oxford, and the Social Centre, Witney. The production was by Colonel Ronald Grant, whose sincere religious approach combined with a high standard of technical knowledge resulted in a most moving presentation.

Every conceivable obstacle seemed to crop up over these productions, but thanks to fine team work and enthusiastic cheerfulness on everyone's part they were successfully overcome.

The dominant note of the audience's reaction was expressed by one of them who said that they had a source of inspiration for many months to come in the memory of the play, and asked that it should become an annual event. And the feeling of the cast is summed up in the words of one of them—"It is so heartening to know we are putting this effort into something really worth while, and to feel that we will go on doing so."

The company, which was doing its first production, contained members of all the Churches.

Windermere. St John's.

As a result of a School of Religious Drama held last June, led by Miss Evelyn Hart, of Salisbury, a group of players produced Elizabeth Heward's short Passion

Play, *According to the Scriptures*, on Good Friday evening. The performance was most moving and impressive, and the players, led by Miss Margaret Cropper, combined excellence of speech and movement with a sincerity and zeal which was truly inspiring. The simplicity of the play makes it particularly suitable for a Church production, and the combination of the dialogues of the Passion with words from psalms and prophecies conveys a message which more elaborate plays might fail to give.

The players had previously performed it on Palm Sunday evening in the village church of Sawrey. A local carpenter had made a simple wooden cross and plinth which they took with them—the only properties needed. M.S.

Dublin. Report from Miss Dorothy Miller.

The Dublin Religious Drama Group presented *The Gates of Hell* on December 2nd and 3rd at the Royal Irish Academy of Music Theatre. The play was produced by Alan Simpson.

It was the most ambitious production from a technical point of view that the Group has yet attempted and drew a larger audience than previous plays.

We were lucky in having a real Missionary who played the part of Billy with a sincerity and conviction that made the Sudan scenes most outstanding. Many people were deeply moved by them and by the Troas scene and the only adverse criticism of the play seems to have been of the Parish Hall Scenes. Some people thought it a pity that Christians were presented to the outside world in such an unattractive light, and others thought it unlikely that one Parish should contain so many unpleasant characters, or that one or two of these would not have responded in some genuine way to the Missionary's appeal.

The general opinion was that this was a most stimulating and truly "missionary" play, and the cast felt that it was a most worthwhile production both from a religious and a dramatic point of view.

Perhaps the best comment on the play is that some of the Senior girls of a Dublin School, who might have been expected merely to get a good laugh out of the Parish Hall scenes in which two of their staff were taking part, told their Headmistress afterwards that they wanted to be missionaries!

Mitcham. The Church of the Ascension, Pollards Hill.

A group of Church folk who are not a continuous Dramatic Society, had come together to give three performances of Lesbia Scott's *Then Will She Return*, on 10th to 12th May. I saw the middle performance, which was creditable for a play which is not easy. The Refectory-Vestry scene was nicely conveyed on a small stage, with a curtain set for the Study. Most of the players came over with real sincerity; the chief fault was lack of pace and variety throughout, and in particular, over-stylization in the Prologue. Over-anxiety prevented the light scenes from being treated with the right casualness. The Rev. Charles Richardson is doing good work with inexperienced players and an even more inexperienced audience. J.P.

East Bristol. The Rev. Ralph Scrine writes:

For four nights during Passion Week, T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* was presented in the parish hall of St Matthew, Moorfields, Bristol, by a group of players of different denominations. Many of them, including Becket, had had no previous experience of acting. The production impressed many people, including the dramatic critic of the *Church of England Newspaper*. While accepting this critic's dramatic judgements, one may perhaps be forgiven for thinking that his sociology belongs to the Romantic School. True, in Bristol East we speak in accents nearer those of Shakespeare than of the B.B.C., but the tones of the West End are not unheard in our midst, nor are they necessarily suspect. True, we have bombed sites and our children play on them (who would not?) but these are not our only playgrounds.

Even so, this is not a district where the name of Mr Eliot is a household word, and we are perhaps more familiar with the claims of Dick Barton than with those of Thomas Becket. It was therefore all the more interesting and indeed gratifying

that sizeable audiences should have sat through each performance in extreme discomfort on hard wooden chairs, without any sign of restlessness. Indeed the silence lasted even beyond the final curtain. On one evening only did clapping break out, and on that evening the players felt that they had slipped.

The play was staged plainly, almost crudely, against a background of curtains, with props made from beer bottle crates, and costumes of hessian. The play had therefore to stand or fall by the quality of the acting and the clarity of the speaking. Rehearsals were begun with considerable trepidation and not a little mystification. The trepidation remained with us till the last rehearsal. But on the production nights the one thing which stood out beyond all else was the degree of pleasure and satisfaction, to say nothing of success, which comes with speaking verse of this quality and speaking it well. Many of us were finally convinced how erroneous is the belief that amateur dramatics are by the nature of things wedded to drawing room comedies.

Many factors contributed to the success of this venture. Two may be picked out. First, the fact that all concerned with the play, on and off the stage, were Church members who approached their task with a real sense of dedication. One result of this was that throughout the rehearsals there were no rows, and (blessed relief!) we were spared any necessity for last night speeches or bouquets. The second factor was the producer, Miss Pamela Keily. What she did for the players cannot be put into words. On one occasion it fell to the lot of the writer to "take" a rehearsal at which Miss Keily could not be present. Afterwards one of the cast remarked kindly to him, "It was awfully nice of you to come along, but of course we did miss having a real producer glaring at us."

Murder in the Cathedral made an impression on East Bristol. Sufficient impression to be discussed in shop queues and barbers' saloons. More than one person was heard to say, "I shall go and see what they do next." We hope they will.

Jennifer Greenwood writes:

I have just seen a most vivid and memorable performance of T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* produced by Pamela Keily and acted by the Redfield United Front in Bristol. It was a great experience in which I wish more could have shared.

I know this play well, but the only other productions which I have seen or been associated with have been professional. In writing this I feel I need make no concession because it was performed by amateurs or in a small church hall.

My chief impressions are of great vitality and that everyone thoroughly understood the text. On thinking back I realize more and more how essentially right was the simple and unobtrusive production for this occasion and group.

As for the acting—I have already mentioned the vitality, often found in performances by young amateurs. To this was added some finely graded and alert choral speaking from the "Women of Canterbury." The greatest compliment I can pay them is that they sounded and looked normal and were never self-conscious. The men were well contrasted and were not afraid of humour and even melodrama when needed. Becket gave a thoughtful interpretation, moved well, and was particularly good in his sermon.

"Proceed straightforward," says Becket, and that is the very note of this logical and well rehearsed production. It was a privilege to see it, and illuminated afresh this fine play.

Romford. Church of the Good Shepherd. *Pilgrim's Progress*.

For those of us who saw the vivid, vital stage production of *Pilgrim's Progress* with which our Church celebrated Holy Week, Bunyan's famous allegory has now a far greater meaning and reality. The colourful costumes, scenery and acting combining to produce an atmosphere of life and gaiety, against which the steadfast endeavours of Christian and his fellow-travellers stood out in sharp contrast.

Throughout the play Bunyan is telling the story to his Gaoler in Bedford Gaol, and only the more interesting parts of the story are actually acted.

Bickley and Widmore. Guild of Players. *Sorrow and Joy.*

Visiting the centre of Bromley for the first time in the 25 years of their existence, the Bickley and Widmore Players gave the Maundy Thursday performance of a Passion play in Bromley Parish Church, which is now a regular event in the programme of the Parish Church forum. On Good Friday evening they presented a stage performance of the same play in Church Hall, Nightingale Lane.

Both performances were well attended. On Good Friday evening the hall was packed. The play was *Sorrow and Joy*, by Mr A. Strudwick, who has been associated with the Players as producer from the beginning. Ably constructed, it tells in retrospect the story of our Lord's birth and ministry, and then deals with the events of Holy Week and the first Easter Day.

Between the Church and the stage performances there were considerable differences. The former was very impressive, and the players adapted themselves to the conditions admirably; but it was necessary to see the stage presentation to appreciate the full effectiveness of the production, with its skilful use of colour and lighting, and its adroit handling of crowd scenes, as in the Palm Sunday episode and in that of the procession to Calvary.

The most striking thing in the production (partly because it was an unusual, if not entirely new, method of treatment) was the reaction of sheer terror in the crowd on Calvary when the storm and earthquake (most realistically presented) came to silence their jeering.

The one criticism of any importance to which this beautiful and most impressive production seemed open was that there was a weakening of imagination in the treatment of the Resurrection scene. One felt that, however powerfully the Crucifixion is presented, the real climax should come in the announcement of the Resurrection.

Poplar.

The Passion Play at All Saints', Poplar, which is now an annual event, was presented again this Easter, and played to a packed church each evening of its week's run. The acting and production is now of a very high order and the crowd scenes in particular were handled with considerable skill. The Last Supper is perhaps the most moving part of the play. It was a pity that the pitch-black intervals between the tableaux of the Crucifixion were quite so long, as this allowed the dramatic tension that had been built up during the first part of the play to fall back to zero, and meant that the Resurrection scene became a dragging anti-climax. Poor lighting in some of the scenes was a small cause of irritation, as it was not always possible to tell who was speaking, especially when there was a spotlight on an unimportant figure for no apparent reason; but against this it must be said that practically every word that was spoken could be heard at the back of the church, and that taken all in all the play redounded greatly to the credit of all those concerned in its presentation.

Harpenden. Extract from the *Herts. Advertiser and St Alban's Times*.

Realism and sincerity marked the presentation, by members of St Nicholas Christian Drama Fellowship, of the Passion play by Margaret Cropper, *Christ Crucified*, in Harpenden Parish Church.

Miss Betty Herring, the young producer, had the support of a large cast, which capably filled the rôles of Bible characters of the time, wearing authentic costumes.

Members of the congregation were provided with a printed synopsis of the six scenes, with an explanation.

Sutton. *The Trinity Players.*

"It was a cold night when I caught the train at Victoria to go down to see *Moses*. The 'Theatre' was the usual church hall with rather hard seats. The first-night audience was disappointingly small, and, knowing that the actors were inexperienced, I settled down to expect the worst.

Go Down Moses is not an elementary play; it is theological verse, which at first sight is enough to strike terror into the heart of any amateur company,

but, it is good drama and good "theatre," and what had promised to be a dull evening turned out to be an exciting experience.

The team spirit behind the production, the sincerity of the performers and skilful handling by the producer, turned this already good play into a fine piece of entertainment, teaching, and witness. The two following nights the house was full—the good news had spread.

The Trinity Players, and their producer, Miss Jessie Powell, are to be congratulated on the great advance they have made since their previous production.

Stroud. *The Pilgrim's Progress.*

Stroud Religious Drama Festival, sponsored by S. Lawrence Stroud Scout Group, Hon. Secretary Netlam Bigg, gave performances, for a week, of Hugh Ross Williamson's version of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. On the Saturday many had to be turned away from the Religious Drama Festival, *Pilgrim's Progress*, in the Parish Church. Inside, every available seat had been taken and people were standing at the back. Nearly every night the Church was full.

Proof that the reputation of the Festival is spreading beyond the confines of the country is borne out by people coming to *Pilgrim's Progress* from places as far afield as Leeds, South Devon, Stratford and Stafford.

Cambridge. *The Mustard Seed.*

The Cambridge University Religion Through Drama production for this year was given at the end of the Lent Term. In 1948, this Cambridge Group acted a play about Jeremiah; in 1949, they provided a modern play on the theme of conversion; this year they looked into the future.

Just as last year, the Cambridge Branch of the Student Christian Movement asked the R.T.D. Group to provide a play to accord with their special subject of study and prayer, they did so again this year for the S.C.M. Federation Week subject of "the World-wide Church." The R.T.D. Group held frequent meetings in the Michaelmas Term to work out what form the play should take, and after considering a wide variety of plots, the one finally decided upon was acted before the University and public for two nights, under the title of *The Mustard Seed*."

The situation envisaged was that just before the subjugation of the world in the year 1974 by "Ptomania," the all-powerful totalitarian state, which suppressed Christianity and enforced scientific humanism as the only creed, an expedition of scientists was sent out from Britain to search for uranium in the African Congo region. As the expedition was despatched with great secrecy, their existence was unknown to the Ptomanian authorities, who quartered an army of occupation in Britain. The members of the expedition, who had taken with them provisions to last for several years, remained in isolation for four years, learning from the wireless, their only contact with the outer world, that they were the only remaining free Christian community. Therefore they decided that it was their duty to quit their isolated security, and return to the world, with a plan for its re-evangelization. There were conflicts between members of the expedition until they were united by the execution of their leader, when the unexpected arrival of a party of Ptomanians discovered their existence. The surviving members then saw the parallel of their situation to that of the eleven Apostles, and fired by the example of those, who, in even less promising circumstances, had set out to win the world for Christ, they set out to return to the world to win it back to Christianity.

As with all R.T.D. productions, the play was created from the ideas of the Group, the members of the cast developing their own dialogue. V.W.

Hampsthwaite. Local Press report:

"MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL." SPLENDID PERFORMANCE BY HAMPSTHWAITE ACTORS

It was apt that the Becket Players who presented T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, at Christ Church on Saturday, should consist in the main of actors from the village of Hampsthwaite.

History tells us that the four knights who murdered Archbishop Becket, in 1170 A.D., took horse at Hampsthwaite before setting out on their ominous journey to Canterbury. It is reputed too, that after the murder the knights returned to Knaresborough Castle.

Perhaps it was because of this local tang, that the Becket Players inspiringly led by Alec Goodrich, as the glory-seeking Archbishop, gave such a praiseworthy performance.

Bermondsey.

The Parish Church presented *Without the Gate*, by F. E. Knox, a drama of the time of Jesus Christ, on Maundy Thursday, April 6th, and Good Friday, April 7th, at 8 p.m.

Glasgow.

Notice from *The Scotsman* on the Iona Theatre's Production of *This Way to the Tomb*, March 30th, 1950.

The Iona Theatre presented last night in the Atheneum Theatre, Glasgow, the first public performance in Scotland of *This Way to the Tomb*, a verse drama by Ronald Duncan, with music by Benjamin Britten.

Despite its forbidding title this play is no mere Jeremiad or exercise in religious mysticism; rather the reverse. It is poetic drama, with a punch, full-blooded but skillfully timed.

The plot is an explosive variation on the theme of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and is set on two levels; the one, in masque form, shows man's struggle towards the light; the second, an antimasque, is a riot of topical heresies round the tomb of St Antony, aimed at discrediting all spiritual enterprise. A dynamic conflict this, with no ammunition barred, not even rocket-firing, aeroplanes, swing music, or television . . .

The Iona Theatre is to be commended very highly for its courage and ambition in undertaking this exacting venture.

Ayr. Mrs Milroy writes:

I have just finished producing *Everyman* in my own Church. It was the first time that a play had ever been done in the Kirk and it certainly created a great deal of interest. The play was performed in place of the evening service on two succeeding Sundays and on the morning of the second Sunday the minister said "The players in *Everyman* last Sunday preached the finest sermon that has ever been heard in this church." I tell you that because I think you might be interested to know that we have started to build up an audience interested in Religious Drama.

South Chingford. New Road Methodist Drama Group.

A Play Reading—shall we say with a difference? Play selected, *Himself Once Offered*, by Leonard Venrier. Scenes selected, The Prologue, Pilate's Court, The Burial Garden.

It was felt that if concentration was to be maintained throughout, it could be helped by some visible symbol and therefore we arranged a flood-lit centre-piece consisting of the Cross, open Bible and white floral decorations, set against a dark background. The readers were not visible, and throughout we were able to make good use of the organ (in the church) for congregational singing and for suitable Passiontide music (background). It was an experiment but a most successful one and many friends have remarked upon the reverent atmosphere which prevailed.

M. I. CHAPMAN.

Enfield. St Mark's Church, Bush Hill Park.

Under the leadership of the Vicar, the Rev. E. F. Starkey, members gave three performances of *Cyprian*, a three-act play by Freda Collins.

The plot was of topical interest, being concerned with the martyrdom in the year 275 A.D. of the Primate of Carthage, on account of his Christian principles.

The cast was large, and truly parochial, the oldest performer being over seventy

years old, and the youngest (whose splendid performance merits mention), was only ten years old. Their sincerity did much to counteract any technical inexperience, and Father Starkey may be congratulated on the hard work and team spirit of over thirty persons, and in giving a most moving and devoted rendering of a difficult play.

The full length version of the play is available for play-readings. A cut version, also available, is recommended for production.

Notting Hill.

A revival of *The Fourth Man*, by Freda Collins, was produced at The Century Theatre (exactly eleven years to the day) on May 25th, 1950, by the Rovers attached to All Saints', Notting Hill, W.11, 61st Kensington Group.

Four of the actors were again taking their original parts, and it was interesting to see how the intervening war years had deepened their understanding.

R. D. S. NOTES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING — ADVANCE NOTICE

The day fixed for the Annual General Meeting is Friday, 17 November, at a time and place still to be arranged; but make a note of the date in your diary and look for further details in the next number.

SUMMER SCHOOL — CHICHESTER 1950

At the time of going to press there are still vacancies for both Ladies and Gentlemen—but especially Gentlemen! So if you have only just found that you are free from July 22nd to 31st, put in your application now.

New Plays added to the Library.

**Beckets of Cheapside, The*. VERA I. ARLETT. 1950. (Independent Press, 1/-.) H. 1 scene. 30 mins. 3 m., 3 w. Incident in the life of Thomas Becket's Crusader father and Saracen mother. (Fee 5/-.)

**Bread of Heaven*. ROBERT DUCE. 1950. (Independent Press, 1/-.) H. 1 act. 30 mins. 3 m., 3 w. The family at Bethany.

**Cocktail Party, The*. T. S. ELIOT. 1950. (Faber, 10/6.) H. Full length. 6 m., 4 w. (Fee: Apply to League of British Dramatists.)

**Henry Bly and Other Plays*. ANNE RIDLER. 1950. (Faber, 10/6.)

Henry Bly. H. Full length. 4 m., 2 w. A modern morality based on Grimm's "Brother Lustig."

**Ploughshares and Pruning Hooks*. JESSIE POWELL. 1950. (N.S.S.U. 1/-.) A Dramatic Presentation of Sunday School Work. Originally presented at the 146th Anniversary of the National Sunday School Union.

**Richard Woodman*. BARBARA VAN KAMPEN. 1950. (Independent Press, 1/-.) 3 scenes. 35-40 mins. Adventures of the Reformer prior to his martyrdom in 1557. (Fee 5/-.)

Reference Books.

Art of T. S. Eliot, The. HELEN GARDNER. 1950. (Cresset Press. 12/6.)
English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans. Its Background, Origins and Developments. A. P. ROSSITER. 1950. (Hutchinson's University Library, 16/-.)

The Passion Play at Oberammergau. 1950. Authorized Text of the Play and Guide Book to Oberammergau. (Ben, 12/6.)

Were You There? JOHN TAYLOR. 1950. (Highway Press, 7/6.) An African Presentation of the Passion Story. Illustrated.

Plays in Typescript.

**The King's Bride*. F. A. EVELYN. H. 3 scenes. 25 mins. 2 m., 4 w. The story of "The Song of Songs."

**Deceitful Heart, The*. K. M. BAXTER. H. 3 acts. 1 set. 3 m., 5 w. The crafts and assaults of the devil and the battle he wages with the Church, traced through a modern comedy in the lives of the five principal characters.

**The Hopeful Travellers*. Adapted from "Les Gueux au Paradis," ANDRE OBEY and G. M. MARTENS, by IRIS CAPELL. H. Full length. 15 m., 5w., supers. An unusual modern morality introducing old Flemish legends. Permission to perform to be obtained from Lady Iris Capell. Acting sets may be hired from the Secretary of The Croydon Players. (Fee £5 5s. 0d.)

New Sets.

The Cocktail Party. T. S. ELIOT.

The Deceitful Heart. K. M. BAXTER. (Typescript.)

RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY

Applications for the post of Secretary are invited from men, preferably between 30 and 50 years of age having knowledge of the theatre. Commencing salary £500 p.a. Write to the Chairman, E. Martin Browne, Esq., c/o J. H. L. Trustram, Esq., 31 Bedford Street. W.C.2.

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CHRISTIAN DRAMA.

Will you please note that the Memoir referred to on, page 1, of Mr Bartholomew, is for the Members of the Religious Drama Society, if you would like one please apply direct to R.D.S, S.P.C.K.House, Northumberland Ave.W.C.2

